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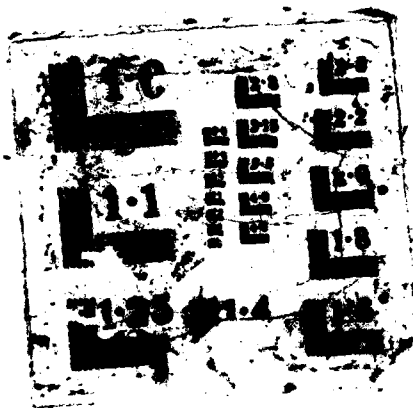
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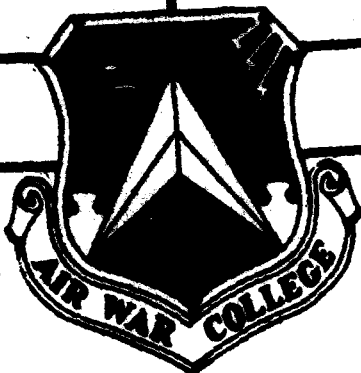
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# AIR WAR COLLEGE

## RESEARCH REPORT

No. AU-ANC-87-163

A COMMON SENSE APPROACH TO STRATEGY

By LIEUTENANT COLONEL RODNEY M. PAYNE

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AIR WAR COLLEGE  
AIR UNIVERSITY

A COMMON SENSE APPROACH  
TO STRATEGY

BY

Rodney M. Payne  
Lieutenant Colonel, USAF

A RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY  
IN  
FULFILLMENT OF THE RESEARCH  
REQUIREMENT

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Joseph L. Strange

MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA  
May 1987

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# AIR WAR COLLEGE RESEARCH REPORT ABSTRACT

TITLE: A Common Sense Approach to Strategy

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➤ Professional military education at all levels emphasizes the necessity for military commanders to study, understand and, in turn, properly apply the classic strategies and principles of war. Using the Civil War career of Lieutenant General Nathan Bedford Forrest as a case study, this paper points out that even though he was uneducated and had no prior military experience, Forrest was a genius in the strategies and principles of war. An analytical discussion of several of Forrest's campaigns is used to support this thesis.

Given the fact that Forrest could not have read or been taught the classic strategies and principles, he undoubtedly adhered to some form of strategy formulation framework which intuitively led him to make the correct military decisions. The author postulates that framework as a basis for the analysis of Forrest's achievements and suggests that the same framework could prove beneficial at all levels of command as a quick reference back-up for contemporary battlefield strategy decisions.

### BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Lieutenant Colonel Rodney M. Payne entered the U.S. Air Force in 1968. He is a command pilot who has served in rated and staff assignments at squadron, wing and Air Staff levels. His rated experience includes instructor and fighter tours in the U.S. and Europe. On the Air Staff, he served under the Director of Plans in the Europe/NATO Division and as Assistant Deputy Directory for Joint and National Security Matters. Lieutenant Colonel Payne holds a B.A. in political science from Mississippi State University. His graduate work was accomplished as an Olmsted Scholar, class of 1973, at the Graduate Institute of International Studies, Geneva, Switzerland. He is a resident graduate of Squadron Officers School, Air Command and Staff College and the Air War College class of 1987.



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

All great captains have accomplished great things only by conforming to the rules and natural principles of the art of war. That is to say, by the nicety of their combinations and the reasoned relation of means to ends, and of efforts to obstacles. Whatever may have been the audacity of their enterprises and the extent of their success, they succeeded only by conforming to rules and principles. (6:1)

In the quote above, Napoleon emphasized the need for all "great captains" to adhere to the rules and principles of war. In the same vein, professional military education has instilled in us the added premise that military success is also dependant on the ability to execute properly these principles within operational frameworks known as strategies. Our training has also reinforced the belief that military strategies, in a generic sense, are as ageless as the works of Sun Tzu, Clausewitz, Liddell Hart, et al. We are taught that in given situations, they can apply today much as they did during the successful efforts of Grant, Eisenhower, and MacArthur.

The genius of these and other well-known military strategists can be easily explained. Each possessed the character traits required for military greatness to include courage, integrity, and perseverance. They all received the best in military education to include heavy indoctrination into the maxims of the great strategists. They all had years of military experience prior to their rise to greatness. It would seem then that the mold for military

genius was predetermined.

As is often the case, some things are not as they first appear. My study of military strategy led me to an individual whose success and acclaim readily qualify him as a military genius. With the exception of the previously mentioned character traits, however, he did not possess a significant number of the historically accepted prerequisites for greatness. The individual in question was a Confederate lieutenant general by the name of Nathan Bedford Forrest.

Forrest presents us with somewhat of an enigma. Throughout the Civil War, he very effectively applied the principles and strategies espoused by the classic strategists. This phenomenon might be easily understood if Forrest had benefitted from the same levels of education and experience as had Grant and Sherman. In fact, Forrest was almost illiterate and had no formal military experience prior to the war.

Forrest's lack of formal training brings several questions immediately to mind. If he could not have read or been taught the basic principles and strategies of war, how could he have known how and when to use them? Is there some unheralded set of human traits or inherent faculties that function in lieu of the fruits of formal military education and experience? If present, do these factors support or deny the agelessness of the classic principles and strategies? Would they be applicable in complex

contemporary warfare? In my view, these factors do exist and, although not all inclusive, the major set includes: (1) intelligence, (2) situational awareness, and (3) a decision process based on logic.

Using Forrest as a case study, this paper discusses the role these factors can play in successful military strategy decisions regardless of one's educational background. To achieve this, Chapter II describes Forrest -- the man. Chapter III provides credibility for his stature as a military genius. Chapter IV then offers a comparative analysis of his strategies which demonstrates that his approach to warfare closely paralleled that of the classical strategists. Having reinforced the ageless nature of the strategies and principles of war, Chapter V explores the reasons for Forrest's success as a function of his apparent use of the "three factors." Lastly, Chapter VI draws some conclusions regarding the applicability of my "three factors" premise to contemporary military thought. To that end, I believe that possession and use of these faculties by contemporary military leaders could prove as beneficial in future conflicts as they were to Forrest in the Civil War. In essence, they constitute a quick reference framework which could prove useful for short-suspense strategy decisions at any level of command. With this in mind, let's first look at Forrest -- the man.

## CHAPTER II

### FORREST -- THE MAN

While education is obviously important to a professional officer, great military accomplishment is not necessarily fostered by formal training of the mind. To come from poverty to fortune is notable under any circumstances, but extraordinary honor is due the man who achieves it without an education.

Two-fold glory should therefore attach itself to the name of Nathan Bedford Forrest, for few of the many gallant men whose names grace the role of honor of the Confederacy rose from such obscure birth to fortune, and subsequently to renown. (7:189)

A study of Forrest's background is thus imperative to understand the apparent dichotomy between his "raisin" and his rise to military fame. To wit, Forrest was born in Bedford County, Tennessee, on 13 July 1821, to a tenant farm family. At age sixteen, his father's death left him responsible for his mother, six brothers, and three sisters. (25:126) Forrest's responsibility for the family deprived him of any opportunity for formal education. Most sources indicate that his "schoolin" consisted of about three months of primary school at the age of fifteen. (25:127)

Although he began on a small farm, he relied on his wits and awareness of "where the money was" to expand his planting operations and branch out into real estate and the slave trade. Just prior to the war, Forrest had amassed a fortune through insight, shrewd judgement, and a

determination which placed him "high among the most successful and active businessmen in Memphis." (25:128) He would later put these traits to extremely good use in the war.

Before leaving our treatment of Forrest -- the man, perhaps a final comparison of backgrounds would help illustrate the almost inevitable trap we encounter when contemplating the molds that create great military minds.

"Of 32 Confederate lieutenant generals and full generals, 29 were professional officers from West Point. The 30th and 31st were Richard Taylor, the son of Zachary Taylor, and Ward Hampton, the wealthy and politically powerful South Carolina seigneur. The last was Bedford Forrest." (24:46)

With a better understanding of the background of the man, let's now examine the extent of his greatness.

### CHAPTER III

#### FORREST -- THE MILITARY GENIUS

Forrest's success as a military commander is well-documented. He entered the war in 1861 as a private. Within a few short months, the governor of Tennessee asked him to raise and equip a regiment of cavalry. His effectiveness in this effort gained him a spot promotion to lieutenant colonel and command of the regiment. From this beginning, his exploits eventually pushed him to the rank of lieutenant general. (12:192) He was the only "private soldier" in either army who was promoted during the war to that level of responsibility. (15:13)

Forrest's strategy as a cavalry commander was to pursue strongly the "indirect approach". Thus aligned within the South's overall strategy of strategic defense, his operational plan was to use his cavalry behind the lines as a highly maneuverable hit-and-run force to destroy, delay, and disrupt the Union lines of communication, supply depots, and reserves so that the primary Union offensives would be incapable of achieving their objectives. (6:5)

With his cavalry, he was a master at knowing his enemy's location and plans, the use of deception, surprise attacks, and relentless pursuit to total defeat of the enemy. Fighting almost always with inferior strength and weaponry, he destroyed railroads; bridges and warehouses; sank gunboats; and cut communications -- all deep in enemy territory. (4:3)

When Forrest and his cavalry operated as part of a larger Confederate force, his genius and the habitually outstanding performance of his troops were not always enough to ensure a Confederate victory. However, in those campaigns which involved only his cavalry and which he directed, Forrest experienced a phenomenal success rate. (25:5) Unfortunately, "his opportunities were never large enough for him to save the Confederacy. (24:46)

Recognition of his genius came as slowly as did his assignment to more important commands. "Certain West Point and political elements in the South...were none too favorable to the rapid promotion of volunteers." (17:33) More specifically, the Confederacy was unfortunate in that "President Jefferson Davis was to see Bedford Forrest through the eyes of General Braxton Bragg (Forrest's long-time commander) until very near the end of the war. Bragg could not realize that a man not professionally trained...might nevertheless be a first-class soldier." (1:102) As a result, Bragg initially assigned him as a raider whom he constantly shifted about and to whom he consistently gave poorly trained and equipped troops. (2:44) Although most sources feel the Confederacy was doomed at the outset for other reasons, perhaps the United States today should be grateful that it was not Forrest who commanded the Confederate forces at the battle of Bull Run.

Brice's Crossroads provides one of the best examples of his wizardry. Also called the Battle of Tishimingo Creek,



this engagement is representative of the odds Forrest faced throughout his career. On 1 June 1864, 8,500 Union cavalry, infantry, and artillery troops under the command of Brigadier General Samuel D. Sturgis were dispatched from Memphis by General Sherman to "kill" Forrest and his 3400 Confederates. (14:25)

Sherman's concern for "that devil Forrest" was well-founded. His campaign against Atlanta depended on a long logistics tail which Forrest had repeatedly cut. (9:23) Having Forrest behind his lines also forced Sherman to divert troops for rearguard action that could otherwise have been used in the offensive.

Forrest was no stranger to Sturgis. Motivated in part by a Sherman promise of promotion to major general for anyone on his staff who killed "that devil," Sturgis had unsuccessfully pursued the elusive Confederate in early 1864 as far south as northern Mississippi. (9:27) On this rainy June day, Sturgis, a West Point graduate with 18 years of combat and staff experience, again moved out "to bring back Forrest's hair." (16:729, 11:363) His command was well-equipped and manned with some of the most seasoned troops in the Union. (9:28, 14:25, 17:237)

As Sturgis drove southwest through Mississippi, Forrest's superb intelligence system provided him with the Union force's disposition and general plan of action. Realizing he was vastly outnumbered, he chose a narrow road intersection as the battle site. His plan was to force a

confrontation with the Union cavalry first, limit the rate at which the Union infantry and artillery could be brought forward to the battle area, and via the thickness of the surrounding ground cover, to limit the effective employment of the larger Union forces. His own forces were able to remain undetected until they launched a series of surprise frontal and indirect attacks on the Union cavalry's flanks and rear. As a result, Forrest routed the numerically superior force and drove them fifty-eight miles in a two-day period. At the final tally, Sturgis lost 1,900 killed, 2000 prisoners, nineteen artillery pieces, 21 cannons, 200 wagons and large quantities of weapons and supplies. (7:375) In routing the Union forces, Forrest suffered only ninety-six killed and 396 wounded. (15:300)

The most telling testimonies of Forrest's genius are from those he fought against. General Sherman stated after the war that Forrest "had a genius that was incomprehensible -- he always seemed to know what I was doing or what I intended to do, while I am free to confess that I could never tell...what he was trying to accomplish." Grant called him "the ablest general in the South." (4:3) Grant and other Union commanders finally put a price on his head. (25:5) It was never collected. In fact, Forrest surrendered the last Confederate force east of the Mississippi. (4:4) Having looked in some detail at the man, let's now turn to his approach to warfare.

## CHAPTER IV

### A CLASSIC APPROACH TO WARFARE

There is a remarkable similarity between the axioms Forrest applied in war and those espoused by some of the classic strategists. To illustrate, I will describe Forrest's approach to several battles while concurrently referencing the parallel dictums of several historical strategists. This methodology should help to point out the agelessness of the principles and strategies of warfare. It should also serve to illustrate that even the uneducated who possess the appropriate faculties can recognize and successfully employ these "natural truths" of war.

As mentioned earlier, the South's overall strategy was that of strategic defense. The intent was to inflict enough punishment on the attacking North to break its will to continue the war. (6:5) As a cavalry commander, Forrest's primary strategic goal was to use his highly maneuverable force to attack the enemy's flanks and rear so as to disrupt lines of communication, interdict supplies, and destroy morale. (Sun Tzu: "The expert approaches his objective indirectly. Such a commander prizes, above all, freedom of action." 19:41)

Within his larger indirect strategy, in battle Forrest relied heavily on the offensive. Speed and firepower were his cornerstones. His personal goal was for each of his troops to carry two revolvers, a rifle and, in many cases, a sawed-off shotgun. This additional firepower,

especially at close range, helped in many cases to offset his opponent's numerical superiority. (8:41)

#### Murfreesboro

Forrest got his first opportunity to test this approach at Murfreesboro, Tennessee in July, 1862. Following recognition of his abilities as the commander of an attached battalion at the battles of Fort Donelson and Shiloh, he was recommended for promotion to brigadier general and transferred to Chattanooga to form and train a new independent brigade. As was to be the case time and time again, Forrest was given a ragged group of untrained and poorly equipped recruits. His orders were to slow the Union's General Buell's offensive thrust from middle Tennessee toward Chattanooga. Forrest characteristically "proposed active duty as a training scheme and the enemy as a source of supply for needed equipment." (15:85) On his fourth day of march toward Buell, Forrest learned that a Union force equal in size to his own was camped on his line of march at Murfreesboro. The Federals, he was told, were holding a significant number of civilian prisoners under the threat of hanging.

Brigadier General T.T. Crittenden had taken command of the Union forces at Murfreesboro that same day and was much dismayed to find that his units were camped too close together. Additionally, he found that no night patrols were ordered and that only a few pickets guarded the camps. He vowed to make changes the next day. (1:87)

Forrest realized his new command needed confidence in him and themselves. He wanted to free the civilian captives and also needed the spoils in arms and equipment that a quick victory would provide. (15:40) At 5 a.m. the next morning, Forrest's scouts quietly captured most of the Union pickets and learned from them of Crittenden's poor defensive position. He ordered an immediate frontal attack on the Union forces who, as of yet, had no idea he was there. (17:65) (Clausewitz: "...a distinguished commander without boldness is unthinkable... therefore we consider this quality the first prerequisite of the great military leaders." 5:192)

The Confederates charged just before reveille under the always up-front presence of Forrest. Crittenden was captured and the 150 civilian prisoners were released in short order. Several of the Union regiments, however, had dug in after the initial attack. Forrest realized he could rout them, but not without a large loss of men. The effort would take time and there was a chance that Union reinforcements would arrive soon and block his withdrawal. Not one to be satisfied with "half" a victory, he therefore turned to a ruse that he used effectively on several occasions during the war. Knowing that the remaining Union commanders could not know his true strength, he called a truce and demanded their unconditional surrender "in order to prevent the further effusion of blood, and added the threat,...that if he had to carry the stockade by storm he

would not be responsible for the consequences." (1:66) Both regiments surrendered. (Sun Tzu: "To capture the enemy's army is better than to destroy it. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill." 19:77)

In this action, Forrest captured 1,200 troops, \$500,000 worth of stores, 60 wagons, 300 mules, 200 horses, and four artillery pieces. Confederate losses were set at 25 killed and 60 wounded. (Sun Tzu: "Here the wise general sees to it that his troops feed on the enemy, for one bushel of the enemy's provisions is equivalent to twenty of his." 19:74)

#### Colonel Streight's Capture

In April 1863, Major General William Rosencrans, Union commander of the Army of the Mississippi, was anxious to find a way to cut Confederate railroads, destroy bridges and foundries and thus destroy Bragg's supply lines. (17:109) Union Colonel Abel D. Streight, "a man of great courage and activity," proposed a plan which Rosencrans readily adopted. (18:215) Streight's scheme called for a force of four well-trained and equipped infantry regiments, mounted on mules, to strike quickly across North Alabama into Georgia behind Bragg's forces to cut the Confederate lines of supply and force Bragg to retreat from East Tennessee. The success of Streight's mounted infantry movement was to be ensured with the help of a parallel decoy march by Union General Dodge. Dodge's force was to move out early to the east and draw all Confederate attention away from Streight's activity further south. (18:215)

The plan worked at first. Bragg ordered Forrest to block Dodge's advance. Although engaged with Dodge, Forrest's insatiable use of scouts and spies brought him news of Streight's force. "He saw through it all in an instant, and formed his plans accordingly." (17:113) (Sun Tzu: "Now the reason the wise general conquers the enemy wherever he moves...is foreknowledge." 19:144)

As Streight pushed eastward, Forrest left enough troops to keep Dodge occupied and began a forced march with 1200 men through the night. He caught Streight approximately 36 hours later. By this time Forrest knew from his scouts that Streight and his 1500 men were intent on continuing the raid. (17:114,116) Since Streight's force continued to move away from him, Forrest, using a direct offensive strategy, attacked immediately with his entire force. (Clausewitz: "...an offensive intending the enemy's collapse will fail if it does not dare to drive like an arrow at the heart..." 5:622)

Following initial heavy fighting, the Federals withdrew and continued their eastward march. After the first engagement, Forrest feared that Streight might turn north and escape. To prevent this, he dispatched a regiment to flank the Federals' line of movement on that side. (17:117) Forrest and the remainder of his troops relentlessly pursued Streight in a running battle -- day and night -- that covered 200 miles. (Sun Tzu: "Keep him under strain and wear him down." 19:68) By this time, most of Forrest's

forces had fallen behind due to the state of their already tired horses. Realizing his own weakening situation, Forrest audaciously demanded Streight's surrender. Through a magnificent ruse that included fictitious orders sent to nonexistent corps and multiple repositioning of the same artillery pieces during the negotiations, 1150 Union soldiers surrendered to 500 Confederates. (18:220) Streight stated later he believed he was outnumbered three to one. (17:124) (Sun Tzu: "All warfare is based on deception. The primary target is the mind of the opposing commander." 19:141)

#### Okolona

In February 1864 General Sherman initiated a plan that would eventually pit Forrest against a force twice his size commanded by Brigadier General William Scoy Smith. Sherman's plan called for a winter offensive to destroy the economies of Mississippi and Alabama prior to the already planned spring offensive against Atlanta. In this early effort, Sherman would sweep east from Vicksburg toward Jackson with four infantry divisions while Smith would move south from Memphis with a handpicked force of 7,700. Their intent was to meet in Meridian and move jointly on to Selma, destroying railroads, farms, and factories as they marched. (11:921)

Smith was no military newcomer. He had ranked sixth in his class at West Point which included Philip Sheridan of the Union and John Hood of the Confederacy. Recently named



Chief of Cavalry of the Army of the Tennessee, he had previously acquitted himself well at Shiloh, Perryville and Vicksburg. (23:464) Nonetheless, Sherman personally warned him that he would probably encounter Forrest on his march. He cautioned him about the "Tennessean's headlong charges, delivered in defiance not only of the odds, but also of the tactics manuals he had never read." (11:923)

Forrest had just returned from West Tennessee where he had gathered 3500 recruits. He had been training these troops in North Mississippi for barely a month when his intelligence network informed him of Sherman's departure from Vicksburg and Smith's imminent departure from near Memphis. (10:930) Additional information led him to believe that "these two movements had a common purpose and objective." (17:176) Forrest was determined to prevent the two from joining forces and therefore chose Smith's smaller column as his objective. Realizing that he was "outnumbered two to one, he could not risk an all-out attack in open country; nor could he lie in wait for the invaders until he knew where they were headed." (10:931) (Sun Tzu: "He who knows when he can fight and when he cannot will be victorious." 19:82)

Lacking a firm grasp of Smith's intentions, Forrest dispersed his forces so as to maintain contact until the enemy's final objective was determined. This became evident a few days later when Smith began systematic destruction of a railroad that ran south through Okolona and West Point to

Meridian. (10:930) Given the odds and open terrain, Forrest was still not ready to attack. He was hoping for reinforcements from General S.D. Lee. When these did not materialize, he orchestrated a plan to draw Smith into a trap at the confluence of several rivers just south of West Point. By properly prepositioning his forces on both sides of the river forks, Forrest felt sure he could defeat the superior Union force in a double envelopment crossfire. (10:931)

Unfortunately for Forrest, Smith's scouts kept him aware of the terrain ahead and Forrest's presence. Additionally, a captured Union trooper escaped from Forrest's camp and reported to Smith that the Confederate force was 8000 or 9000 strong. (10:929) At this point, bad weather and a late start had Smith ten days behind his schedule to meet Sherman. He was also burdened with 3000 freed slaves that had joined him along his march. As a result, he decided to abandon his march and withdraw to Memphis. We can only surmise as to the impact the escaped trooper's "intell" and Sherman's warning about Forrest had on his decision. Afterwards, Smith declared "I was determined not to move my encumbered command into the trap set for me by the rebels." (10:930)

Having gained what he called the "bulge" [read initiative], Forrest ordered his entire command to pursue the retreating Union forces. There followed a series of engagements among which two near Okolona are worthy of

mention.

In the first, Forrest used his favorite scheme of fighting, sometimes mounted and sometimes dismounted. He believed that dismounted troops, acting as infantry, were more accurate in their fire and less vulnerable than when mounted. His mounted troops, on the other hand, gave him speed, mobility, and better penetration capability. In the first effort against a strongly positioned Federal rearguard, he had three Confederate regiments dismount and conduct a frontal charge while he attacked the enemy's flank with a mounted regiment. (Sun Tzu: "He who knows the art of the direct and indirect approach will be victorious." 19:106) The larger Federal force withdrew to regroup. Having lost the element of surprise, Forrest then had his entire force assume a strong defensive position. The Federal forces counterattacked and were badly defeated in what degenerated into close combat in thick brush. Although superior in number, the Federals and their rifles were no match in that environment for the Confederates and their revolvers. (7:375) (Clausewitz: "Even in a defensive position awaiting the enemy assault, our bullets take the offensive. So the defensive is a shield made up of well-directed blows." 5:357)

Forrest pursued Smith for two days in running skirmishes before his men's exhaustion and lack of ammunition finally stopped the chase. Smith continued his retreat to Memphis, convinced that Forrest's aggressiveness

was a sure indicator that General S.D. Lee's reinforcements had joined the fight. (10:933) Although the Union incurred only 388 casualties to Forrest's 144, the Union defeat had "filled every man connected with it with a burning shame." (10:934) On a grander scale, Smith was unable to join with Sherman and their planned march on Selma was not to be.

#### Brice's Crossroads

In the previously mentioned battle at Brice's Crossroads, Mississippi, Forrest again used his intelligence network to determine the size, location, and intentions of General Sturgis' force. (Sun Tzu: "Therefore, determine the enemy's plans and you will know which strategy will be successful." 19:100)

Sturgis and his combined arms force of 8,500 had left Memphis on 1 June 1864. They moved southeast into Mississippi with the dual objectives of destroying the Confederate rail system in the state and, of even greater import, of eliminating Forrest as a threat to Sherman's lifelines. Unfortunately for Sturgis, he was "moving blind with information exceedingly meager and unsatisfactory." (1:284) Forrest, meanwhile, had been ordered back into Tennessee with his 3,500 cavalry troopers to again cut Sherman's supply lines. On 3 June, General S.D. Lee called him back into Mississippi to meet Sturgis' threat. (11:365) Forrest's scouts soon advised him that Sturgis had taken the Ripley-Guntown road and that he would, as a result, have to pass through an intersection well-known to him, Brice's

Crossroads. (11:366)

Realizing that he was vastly outnumbered, Forrest's strategy was to force the battle at a place and in a sequence of his choosing. By controlling these factors, he felt he could defeat the numerically superior enemy in manageable segments. (15:286) He knew the narrow road through Brice's Crossroads would force the enemy to string out its columns with the cavalry in the lead. As Forrest surmised,

The road along which they will march is narrow and muddy; they will make slow progress... Their cavalry will move out ahead of their infantry... and should reach the crossroads three hours in advance." (11:366-367)

Sturgis continued to find it impossible to gain any accurate information regarding Forrest's location or intent. He resolved "to move forward, keeping my force as compact as possible and ready for action at all times." (11:367) Forrest's elusiveness and choice of the battle site forced Sturgis out of his strategy and created Union vulnerabilities. The narrow road, surrounded by thick undergrowth, did force the Union cavalry to string out and limited the number of troops that could be brought forward at a given time. It also allowed Forrest to preposition and hide his flanking troops. The size and wet condition of the road and Sturgis' decision to let his tired infantry rest in camp a little longer caused the gap between the Union infantry and cavalry that Forrest had forecast. (3:36) In essence, Forrest had forced the larger force to advance on

his terms.

In the interim, Forrest had quickly occupied the crossroads and sent out skirmishers to engage and draw the Union cavalry into battle. (Sun Tzu: "Generally he who occupies the field of battle first is at ease. Offer the enemy a bait to lure him." 19:66,96)

The Union cavalry responded to the bait and arrived at Brice's near 10:00 a.m. Forrest immediately initiated repeated fierce charges against the Union cavalry's front and flanks which resulted in a panicked call for the infantry to be rushed forward to reinforce. Forrest anticipated this action and that the Union infantry would be brought forward on the run for five or six miles in the sweltering heat. By the time they arrived, he had defeated the Union cavalry and then easily routed the exhausted infantry. (Sun Tzu: "Know the ground, know the weather; your victory will then be total." 19:129) Forrest's troops pressed the rout for two days, killing and taking prisoners to a point where the Union commander stated, "For God's sake, if Mr. Forrest will let me alone, I will let him alone. You have done all you could...now save yourselves." (15:296) (Clausewitz: "The aim of war should be to defeat the enemy. The fighting forces must be destroyed; that is, they must be put in such a condition that they can no longer carry on the fight." 5:90,595)

The above examples should serve to illustrate that Forrest effectively applied the classic strategies from the

very beginning of his career. It is also evident that he relied on the principles of war to include objective, offensive, surprise, economy of force, maneuver, timing and tempo, etc. Therefore, in light of his background and subsequent unexpected military achievements, we can now look to plausible reasons for his strategic acumen.

## CHAPTER V

### A COMMON SENSE FRAMEWORK FOR STRATEGY

The preceding pages have discussed Forrest's background, his military genius, and several analytical examples of his successful approach to warfare. It is evident that he used effectively what Napoleon referred to as the "natural" rules and principles of the art of war. It is equally obvious that his employment of these rules and principles resulted from factors other than military education and experience. A pattern emerges from the study of his campaigns: He repeatedly employed the same common sense framework for military decisions that had worked so well for him in pre-war civilian life. As previously postulated, his decisions were apparently made within a framework that consisted of the following factors: (1) intelligence, (2) situational awareness, and (3) a decision process based on logic.

#### Intelligence

In Forrest's case, intelligence was a double-faceted factor -- information and intellect. His masterful use of the first aspect ensured him of continuous accurate information on his adversary. Numerous examples have already been cited where his effective employment of scouts, spies, informers, and captives kept him fully aware of his enemy's size, composition and intentions. Thus armed, he was much better prepared to formulate his strategy.



But Forrest was rarely satisfied with controlling only half of the information equation. He habitually expended a great deal of effort to deny his opponent the same information. Decoys, feints and misinformation were his primary tools in this area. (14:22,48) Brice's Crossroads provides a typical example.

Forrest used local residents, escaped slaves and prisoners, as well as his spies to spread misinformation, forcing Sturgis to know only what Forrest wanted him to know. These methods...led Sturgis to report after the battle that Forrest had 15,000 to 20,000 men during the battle and pursuit. The fact remains that Forrest had no more than 3,400 at any time during the battle. (9:33)

Although his mastery of the information equation was a major factor in his success throughout the war, it was no more significant than the second aspect of the intelligence factor -- superior intellect. Clausewitz said that "no great commander was ever a man of limited intellect. Continual change and the need to respond to it compels the commander to carry the whole intellectual apparatus of his knowledge with him." (5:146) Forrest first proved his intellect prior to the war in his business ventures. His capacity for rational thought simply carried over into the military arena. It allowed him to effectively glean, sort and store the multitude of facts that war produces. His intellectual prowess was perhaps best encapsulated by the Commander-in-Chief of the British Imperial Forces, Viscount Wolseley, around the turn of the century.

What he [Forrest] lacked in book-lore was, to a large extent, compensated for by the soundness of his

judgement upon all occasions, and by his power of thinking and reasoning with great rapidity under fire and under all circumstances of surrounding peril or of great mental or bodily fatigue. (1:37)

Having underlined Forrest's capacity and successful use of the intelligence factor, let's look next at the pivotal factor in the framework -- situational awareness.

#### Situational Awareness

Situational awareness (SA) is, simply stated, an assessment of the military situation. It is the commander's multidimensional picture of the combat environment. It involves, but is not limited to, his objective, his forces, their size and deployment, the enemy, his objectives, the size and composition of his forces, their deployment, the terrain, the weather, etc. From this assessment, a commander must formulate and implement his strategy. The key is that any assessment is based on the commander's perception of the situation. The hard part is ensuring that perception corresponds to reality. (20:14-3:22:3)

Accurate and timely intelligence is critical to bring perception and reality as close together as possible. The quality of the "information" factor can cause SA to vary from absolute to best guess. (22:4) At the upper end of the spectrum, history provides numerous examples of how our SA improved and the resulting strategies succeeded as a result of quality intelligence. Our breaking of the German and Japanese communication codes in World War II immediately comes to mind. On the other hand, the Germans' uncertainty

prior to Normandy illustrates the down side. In essence, the commander's SA may never be any better than his worst piece of information. In that regard, bad information on some piece of the picture or misinformation can be worse than no information at all. Such was the case for the Germans at Normandy.

As described, the "information" factor, if properly applied, provides the commander with pieces of the battlefield picture. In the perfect scenario, the pieces are combined in an SA assessment which results in a revealing mosaic. This mosaic provides the commander with a solid foundation upon which to base his strategy decisions.

Unfortunately, the real-world situation is rarely static. In most cases, the dynamic nature of war causes frequent changes in one or more pieces of the picture. The result is a moving mosaic whose clarity is normally directly proportional to the commander's ability to gather, sort, and correctly interpret the pieces at a given point in time and to interpolate into the future. Dynamic changes require that the commander continually update his SA and, perhaps in turn, his strategy. Liddell Hart points out that "in any problem where an opposing force exists....one must foresee and provide for alternative courses. Adaptability is the law which governs survival in war." (13:330) Accurately updated SA gives the commander the means to adapt effectively and exploit to his advantage those inevitable changes.

Throughout his career, Forrest excelled at maintaining situational awareness. As one of his foremost biographers, General Thomas Jordan, pointed out, "At critical instants he was ever quick to see, clear in his provisions, swift to decide, and swift to act." (14:47) He enhanced the accuracy of his SA by spending most of his time up front where he could personally observe the enemy. "With his acute judgement and power of perception, he was thus generally able to find out for himself." (1:35) It should be evident that in most cases, Forrest's SA mosaic gave him a characteristically clear picture. Armed with solid intelligence and superior situational awareness, he was normally well-prepared to formulate logically his strategy. He was equally ready to modify or change his approach if the situation warranted.

#### Logic

Given solid intelligence in both senses of the word and clear situational awareness of the composition and capabilities of opposing forces, Forrest used logic as the final and determining factor in his choice of strategies. I think Liddell Hart agreed with the same basic approach when he said, "the beginning of military wisdom is a sense of what is possible. It is folly to bite off more than you can chew." (13:335)

Although simple in principle as a decision framework factor, the proper use of logic or common sense in strategy formulation can be quite involved. The basic question is

whether or not your chosen approach (defense, offense, direct, indirect, etc.) makes sense. If you possess overwhelming superiority, that may be the end of it. If, however, you, like Forrest, find yourself fighting outnumbered with inferior technology, the process becomes more difficult. The self-questioning process should continue. If the choice makes sense, will the enemy expect it and be able to counter? If so, does he have some obvious vulnerability that can be exploited? If he doesn't, can you employ your forces so as to cause him to poorly employ his? The process continues until arrival at a point where you are inside the enemy commander's mind, you know his objective, you know your objective, you know the respective strengths and weaknesses and you are convinced your choice is doable.

Once the strategy is chosen, it should be executed with adaptable alternatives in mind. As Liddell Hart reminds us, "Keep your object in mind, while adapting your plan to circumstances." (13:335) History has shown that circumstances invariably change.

In Forrest's case, "he applied his own common sense to carry out the war instinct that was in him." (1:31) Forrest almost always fought outnumbered and perhaps, by necessity, took the logic process a step further than has been explained above. Fighting outnumbered forced him to look for exploitable enemy vulnerabilities. He was habitually successful in this through a strong SA process in which "his keen eye watched the whole fight and guided him to the weak

spot." (21:245) On those rare occasions when he could find no weakness, he turned to innovation and creative thinking.

In December 1862 Forrest had conducted a very successful series of interdiction raids in Tennessee. As he made his way back to Mississippi, he encountered a Union force which he attacked and fought to a point where the Federals raised white flags of surrender. Unfortunately, Forrest, in a rare lapse of SA, was attacked from the rear by a second Union force that had slipped in undetected. The original foe withdrew the white flags and renewed the fighting. (17:90) Outnumbered on both sides and with most of his men dismounted, Forrest was asked by his subordinates for new orders. Realizing he had to do something to give his dismounted troops time to regain their horses, Forrest divided his remaining mounted troops and gave orders to "charge both ways." (10:68) This move totally surprised the Federals and gave him the time he needed to remount and move out of reach. Thus, an apparently "illogical" move was the logical thing to do under the circumstances. (7:373)

The "three factors" strategy equation just discussed is obviously not presented as a guaranteed shortcut to proper military decisions. It can provide, however, a simple framework for reference in future conflict when the "fog of war" and its accompanying changes have made pre-planned strategies obsolete or unworkable. It appears applicable at all levels of command in that it simply guides a commander to know his enemy, know himself and finally decide on a plan

based on the logical criteria of the power relationship  
between opposing forces.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSIONS

To this point, the essence of this paper is that Forrest, although uneducated and untrained, successfully applied many of the classic strategies and principles of war. The specific combinations of Forrest's choices are important because they illustrate his success in different circumstances and his adaptability to changing situations in combat. The South's loss of the war is not important. If overall defeat eliminates participants from our inquiries into the sources of strategy, then the efforts of Napoleon, Guderian, etc., should be stricken from our texts. In that light, what else can we derive from our study of Forrest?

In my view, we can again underline the agelessness of the basic strategies and principles. They have endured since the beginning of organized warfare with minor modifications to accommodate changing capabilities. Sun Tzu certainly believed in them in 500 B.C. when he said, "If a general who heeds my strategy is employed he is certain to win." (19:66) Although modification will continue to occur with changes in technological capabilities, I believe the basic tenets will remain applicable as long as nations go to war.

This study has also changed my opinion regarding the true source of classic strategies and principles. Till now, my military education has led me to believe that they were



factors created or invented by learned minds such as Clausewitz, Sun Tzu, Jomini, and Hart. They were to be memorized and used later as required according to the situation. I am now more inclined to believe that, as Napoleon inferred in the opening quote of this paper, they are "natural principles" or truths of the art of war.

Normally they are learned by study and experience. But how did a man like Forrest acquire these axiomatic truths. In my view, he relied on the same faculties that made him a success in his earlier civilian life. The factors I focused on are intelligence, situational awareness, and a decision process based on logic. Outstanding intelligence methods and exceptional intellect gave Forrest the ability to gather, grasp, retain and interpret the vast quantities of sometimes contradictory facts that war generates. As Clausewitz said, intellect gives one "the inner light which leads to the truth." (5:102) Good situational awareness gave Forrest a preview of what was to come. It illuminates, in the mind's eye, the participants and the environment in which war is to take place. It is a dynamic multi-dimensional insight into the quantities, capabilities and deployment of opposing forces. I think Sun Tzu understood this factor when he said "Know the enemy, know yourself: ...know the ground; know the weather; your victory will then be total." (19:129) In order to use these factors effectively, Forrest must have also used a decision process based on logic. It is through this common sense process

that one makes the correct decisions. In the opening reference, Napoleon referred to it as the "reasoned relations of means to ends." In short, I believe the military leader who possesses and uses this framework is well on his way to unlocking the "truths".

In my opinion, this framework could prove beneficial in future combat as a quick reference back-up to our contemporary strategy planning approach. Several factors seem to support this belief. For example, all have agreed that we will fight jointly in any major contingency. As a result we have developed joint theater war plans via the deliberate planning process which will serve to mobilize, deploy, supply, and initially employ our forces. Unfortunately, these plans are based on anticipated enemy action. As previously mentioned, the fog of war and unanticipated moves by the enemy may quickly invalidate our preplanned strategies and thus require short notice adaptive changes. Additionally, our current joint planning process is slow and cumbersome. Future combat may not allow us the time to use the existing system. Modern warfare may well force the decision process back into the hands of the combat leader on the scene. Unfortunately, our combat strategy planning experience is dwindling and, in my opinion, our exercise programs in this area continue to allow too much simulation to gain maximum possible benefit.

Moreover, the nature of war and the battlefield seem to be changing. Technology and doctrine are driving both sides

to high-speed maneuver warfare. As they are developed, purchased, and deployed, real-time C<sup>3</sup>I systems will provide the commander vital information in this more rapidly-paced conflict. He may not have to be up-front like Forrest, but he will face the same requirement for short-notice flexibility in his strategy. In the final analysis, commanders at all levels may need a quick-reference strategy formulation framework as they are forced to respond individually to quick and dynamic changes in the battle.

In that light, I strongly support the continued study of the strategies and principles of war as a mandatory requirement for contemporary military minds. I, for one, am not prepared to wager that I am as inherently blessed as Forrest with the ability to employ the framework. Our studies help to offset that probability by providing us with an expanded baseline of data points and lessons learned. In making decisions in modern warfare, hopefully we will use to the fullest whatever measure of education and "three factors" expertise we possess. A combination of the two should get the job done.

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